



State of Utah

Department of
Natural ResourcesROBERT L. MORGAN
Executive DirectorMICHAEL O. LEAVITT
GovernorOLENE S. WALKER
Lieutenant Governor

January 23, 2004

Ms. Phillis Johnson-Ball
Office of the Secretary
Case Control Unit
STB Finance Docket No. 34075
Surface Transportation Board
1925 K Street, NW
Washington, D. C. 20423-0001

RE: Finance Docket No. 34075, Six County Association of Governments - Construction and Operation - Rail Line between Levan and Salina, Utah - Draft Scope Analysis

Dear Ms. Johnson-Ball:

The Utah Department of Natural Resources has reviewed the Draft Scope of Analysis for the Central Utah Rail Project (CURP) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) being developed for the proposed construction and operation of a new rail line between Levan and Salina, Utah. The following comments identify issues which the department has determined should be included in the Scope of Analysis and addressed in the EIS.

The department appreciates that the comments submitted in its December 8, 2003, letter appear to have been acknowledged in the Draft Scope of Analysis. However, the **Impact Categories** listed in the Draft Scope of Analysis appear to be somewhat generic. The department recommends that the categories reference several resources more specifically.

The proposed alignment for the CURP crosses the western portion of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' Redmond Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is protected under the Redmond Wetlands Conservation Easement. The purpose of this easement is to preserve and enhance high priority resident and migratory wildlife habitat, and to retain and manage public access for wildlife related recreational activities. Placement of the railroad through this property may adversely impact both wetland and upland habitats, as well as the wildlife species that rely on these lands. In addition, the railroad may restrict public access if any of the proposed right-of-way is posted as private property. Importantly, the majority of the water for the wetlands in the area comes from irrigation effluent on adjacent farmlands west of the property. The proposed

Page 2

Ms. Phillis Johnson-Ball

January 23, 2004

placement of the railroad may inadvertently disrupt the flow of water from the west that is crucial to the maintenance and health of the wetland habitat in the area. The department recommends that the EIS include specific reference to the Redmond WMA under **Category 2, Biological Resources**. This subsection should also contain specific reference to Yuba Lake State Park.

Wetlands associated with the Sevier River, Yuba Lake and the Redmond WMA provide important habitat for numerous waterfowl species. Moreover, these wetlands are a portion of an integrated wetland habitat that supports one of the most critical western flyways for migratory waterfowl. These wetland resources should be specifically referenced under **Category 3, Water Resources**.

Category 4, Geology and Soils, should include paleontological and mineral resources as resources which will be addressed in the EIS.

Category 6, Noise, should include reference to the Yuba Lake State Park Painted Rocks Campground and Day-Use Beach as one of the "sensitive receptors" to be addressed in the EIS.

The proposed CURP route intersects the Yuba Lake State Park entrance road near Painted Rocks Campground and Day-Use Beach. The entrance road provides access to approximately 30,000 park visitors per year. The campground is currently being expanded and improved to accommodate 50,000 visitors per year. **Category 9, Safety**, should include specific reference to this resource.

The proposed alignment crosses Yuba Lake approximately midway between the dam and the Sevier River inlet. Yuba Lake is an important component of the Utah state parks system. Impacts to water related recreationists and their ability to freely traverse Yuba Lake must be assessed in the EIS. **Category 10, Transportation** and **Category 12, Recreation**, should include reference to Yuba Lake. Additionally, recreational access to the Redmond WMA should be specifically addressed in these categories.

Wildlife/vehicle collisions are a significant cause of big game mortality on I-70 in Salina Canyon between Salina and the Southern Utah Fuels Company (SUFCO) exit. Coal-haul truck traffic originating from the SUFCO mine is a significant source of this mortality. The proposed rail line has the potential to alter the amount of this traffic through the canyon; therefore, this issue should be identified in **Category 2, Biological Resources** and **Category 10, Transportation Systems**.

Page 2

Ms. Phillis Johnson-Ball

January 23, 2004

The Utah Department of Natural Resources appreciates this opportunity to continue to participate in the EIS process for this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert L. Morgan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "Morgan" clearly distinguishable.

Robert L. Morgan, P. E.
Executive Director

RLM/VP/btb